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**GEOGRAPHIC  
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MEMORANDUM**

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20 November 1959

***THE CHINA-INDIA BORDER DISPUTE***

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**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS**

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Nilang Area (S Map Inset B): The largest area in dispute is north of Nilang, a small semipermanently inhabited village located about 20 miles south of the water-divide passes. In 1996, a Chinese patrol advanced within a short distance of the village, causing an Indian protest to be lodged. Between Nilang and the passes are two small summer settlements and high pastures suitable for seasonal grazing. Indian maps mark the border along the passes on the line of water parting, whereas Chinese maps show a line running northwest-southeast just north of Nilang village. The uncertain status of the area is reflected on older maps of the region. A recent 1987 edition of the Atlas produced by the U.S. State Department on US-produced maps which show a border approximately in agreement with Chinese maps. The Indians maintain that a meeting between British and Tibetan officials in 1926 produced considerable evidence of past Indian ownership of this area.

### Assam-Tibet Sector

The crux of the Sino-Indian dispute over the NEPA area concerns the validity of the tripartite 1914 Simla Convention -- which was signed by Great Britain and Tibet but not by China -- and the appended convention map upon which the Tibet-India border (McMahon Line) was drawn. The primary purpose of the convention was to clarify Tibet's relationships with India (Great Britain) and China. India points out that subsequent Chinese protests over the Simla agreement were concerned with these relationships -- particularly the demarcation of Inner and Outer Tibet -- not with the validity of the Convention. India claims the line is "illegal" since China did not sign or ratify the Simla Convention. He maintains that Tibet was then and is still part of China and cites old maps to support the Chinese claims.

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### Related Border Problems

At the western end of the China-India frontier, disputes have arisen between Pakistan and China over their boundary in the tiny mountain state of Hunza. Chinese claims to Hunza are of long standing, dating at least to the early nineteenth century; Hunza, on the other hand, maintained counterclaims in Sinkiang and the Upper Yarkand area. Traditionally, gifts were exchanged between the Mir (ruler) of Hunza and the principal Chinese official in Kashgar. In 1935, following more active Chinese interest in Hunza, British officials persuaded the Mir to abandon most of his claims and end the exchange of gifts. Although at one time both Nationalist- and Communist-produced Chinese maps showed all of Hunza as part of China, recent Chinese maps indicate claims to "only" parts of eastern Hunza. The area is small (about 675 square miles according to the Survey of Pakistan Political Map) but includes the potentially strategic Khunjerab and Pamir Passes leading into Sinkiang. Particularly troublesome are the grazing areas of the Shamsal Pass, near Darband (Darvaza), which the Mir still claims. This interpretation is supported by Pakistani maps. Despite recently increased Chinese activity here, the Hunzakuts still continue to use the pastures near Darband.

### Prospects for Future Settlement

Neither India nor China can make an entirely open-and-shut case for its position on all disputed areas. Aside from the onerous task of evaluating the relative validity of Chinese and Indian claims, negotiations over many of the disputed areas will be hampered and confused by the lack of basic surveys and accurate maps. The complexity of these problems coupled with the lack of basic information suggests that any final settlement of the border will neither be soon nor easily accomplished.

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The current border dispute between China and India is the outgrowth of a long period of growing tension along China's 9,400-mile frontier from Afghanistan to Burma. Only one small section (the 10-mile Sino-Tibet border) has been demarcated on the ground. For the remainder of the border the best of the alleged "historical tradition" is the word and the spoken line in the east. The former is subject to varying interpretations, and the legality of the latter is in question. The dispute is further complicated by a juxtaposition of ancient treaties and maps, national pride, and national past grievances. The setting of the dispute is an area of generally unpopulated high mountains and desolate plateaus that are little known and poorly mapped. Access to the frontier is difficult, particularly from the low plains of the Indian subcontinent, long difficult access must be made to the high mountainous frontier where even the passes are at elevations of more than 15,000 feet. To southeast the Chinese side of the frontier is backed by plateaus and mountains, generally 15,000 to 20,000 feet high, and access to the border is less welcome. Except for the Sino-Tibet road which traverses the disputed Aksai Chin area, no extensive roads currently cross the Indo-Chinese border. On the Tibetan side, however, only a few miles remain to be finished in order to complete a road connecting northern India with southern Tibet.

Minor border disputes have punctuated the history of sections of the frontier -- particularly the Tibet border west of Nepal -- but, heretofore, conflicting territorial claims have been important only locally. The political status that prevailed along the frontier prior to 1949 ended with the Chinese Communist occupation of Sikkim and Tibet in 1950-51. China established military garrisons near the frontier, constructed roads, and initiated surveillance procedures for traders and pilgrims entering Tibet. India reacted by establishing a limited network of frontier posts, beginning the construction of roads into the mountainous frontier lands, and extending the territory delineated by the Inner Line, which within considerable national boundaries obtain special permission to approach the frontier region. Trade relationships based on confidence became more formalized as both signed trade agreements first with India (1954) and then with Nepal (1956) by which traders and pilgrims were required to enter western Tibet only by certain designated passes and routes and to travel as part of Tibetan caravans.

Chinese interference with the activities of Indian officials and traders began prior to the March 1959 Tibetan revolt but increased after the revolt. Eventually the influx of refugees into northern India and the border states and the actual extension of the area covered by armed patrols along many sections of the Indo-Tibet and poorly mapped frontier regions in Nepal, India, and Tibet. In late August 1959, India notified that border clashes had occurred along the McMahon Line. In early September the Government of India published the Sino-Indian notes on the border and related issues since 1954, and thereby focused attention upon the disputed nature of the frontier, the conflicting cartographic representations of the border, and the various issues and areas in dispute.

Sino-Tibet-Tibet Border (See Map Sheet A)

The China-India frontier in the north consists of an extensive northeast-southwest-trending region that extends from Afghanistan eastward to the Bay of Bengal. It is bordered on the north and south by the massive Indian and Burmese ranges, respectively. Between the Indian and Burmese ranges, the area is a belt of nearly impenetrable high plateaus and mountain lands that rise in width from about 20 miles in the east to about 120 miles westward to the Tibet. The entire frontier region is high, cold, and barren, with no permanent settlements; only a few nomadic villages in the region sufficient to attract trade.

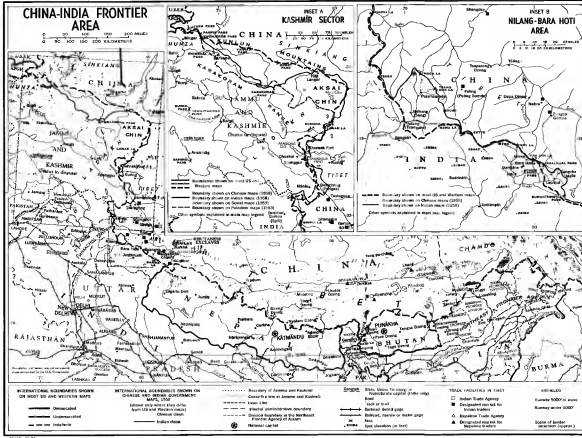
Maps of the China-India border differ widely in their portrayal of the boundary. Both Nationalist and Communist Chinese maps show a border generally following the crest of the Karakoram Mountains. In contrast, some British maps dating back at least to the 1850's show the boundary as following the crest of the Karakoram. For to the north, a line of the Karakoram Mountains. The Chinese did not reply to this proposal. British explorations and expeditions to travel inland in the upper Karakoram area north of the Karakoram Mountains interfering with India-China trade caravans apparently provided the basis for the British version of the border along the Karakoram. In the latest official Indian and Chinese maps of the border, the Karakoram Mountains are shown as a series of peaks and ridges, and the Karakoram Mountains are shown as a series of peaks and ridges.

**McMahon and Large-scale (British) Survey of India maps of this area were considered in showing the border. United States cartographers have used as an authority for the Sino-Tibet border the British map of 1907, which shows the 14,000,000 map of Northern India (1907-1917). First published in 1907, the Government-proposed map, however, normally carry a caveat to the effect that the US Government may not recognize the boundaries shown.**

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Indicated upon the border from Afghanistan to the Karakoram Pass agree in general, with the Chinese version. But of the Karakoram Pass, however, the boundary alignments differ markedly. Indian, British, and United States maps show a boundary following, in part, the crest of the Karakoram to about 6,000 feet from here the line trends northwesterly across the Karakoram to about 12,000 feet from here the version of the border near the India. For the location of the border segment east of the Karakoram Pass, Indian officials apparently have advanced the established principle as the chief criterion. The Aksai Chin area, however, consists of a series of peaks and ridges with interior drainage; their extendable are circular and, consequently, nearly impossible for boundary marking. Soviet maps and the 1959 Survey of National Political Map show a boundary between the Chinese and Indian versions, but somewhat closer to the Chinese.

**Aksai Chin Area:** The dispute over the desolate Aksai Chin area involves about 70,000 square miles of unpopulated high plateaus with extreme elevations generally above 10,000 feet and several broadish lakes surrounded by extensive saline deposits. The area is so inhospitable that even fuel, fodder, and potable water are difficult to find. In 1959, an Indian patrol sent to investigate the

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**Area:** 400 square miles. High peaks, steep slopes. Generally occupied by nomadic herders. Mountain passes of Chinese patrol as border passes.

**Area:** 10,000 square miles. High, steep slopes and mountains. Generally unpopulated. Border incidents near this mountainous area and its south end.

**Area:** 100 square miles. High, steep slopes and mountains. Generally unpopulated. Border incidents near this mountainous area and its south end.

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intended to refer to the northern Ladakh border in the Aksai Chin area, which is with Sikkim rather than with Tibet. The source of knowledge concerning the Aksai Chin, the lack of population and administration, and discrepancies in both old and current maps of the area suggest that the 1982 treaty may have applied only to the eastern Ladakh border with Tibet.

Although Prime Minister Nehru has pressed India's ownership of the Aksai Chin area with vigor, his remarks to the Indian Parliament indicate that the area is in a different category from other India-China border disputes. On 10 September, Nehru stated, "It is a matter for argument as to what part of it belongs to us and what part of it belongs to somebody else. . . . This particular area stands by itself. It has been in challenge all the time."

**Pangong-Tso and Spangur-Tso Areas:** Several Ladakh-Tibet border areas just north of the Aksai Chin area are disputed, the major problems being the interior of the "controversy line" cited in the 1982 treaty and the determination of major villages. In the past, disputes in this area (usually over seasonal grazing rights) have been caused by the indefinite nature of the frontier.

In the Pangong-Tso and Spangur-Tso areas, about 700 square miles are in dispute. The area is generally inhabited only seasonally by nomads and their flocks. North of Pangong Tso, Chinese maps -- and most other maps except those of India and Pakistan -- show a boundary generally following the watershed between the upper Spangur tributaries and the interior drainage basins of the Tibetan plateau. Indian maps show a border line 10 to 15 miles to the east. At Spangur Tso (highest lake) and Spangur Dargat Grouse at the western end of the lake, border incidents have occurred recently. Chinese troops west of Spangur reportedly are not 5 miles from an Indian landing strip at Chum. From the viewpoint of territory, the Chinese version of the border, particularly north of Pangong Tso -- appears sound. There is, however, some merit in having the boundary of Pangong Tso cross the small bit of land separating the two arms of the lake in accordance with the Indian view, thus placing Chumrat Fort within India. The Indians state that in a 1954 conference between British and Tibetan officials over disputed pasture areas, Indian participation over Spangur Tso was not disputed. In the case of Spangur Tso, however, the location of the lake within Tibet -- as shown on Chinese maps -- appears logical from the standpoint of physical geography since the lake is within the interior drainage system of the Tibetan plateau.

**Demarcation Area:** For a few miles south of Spangur Tso, the Indian and Chinese borders coincide. In northeastern Ladakh, however, the maps show in showing where the border crosses the Indus, with Indian maps placing the border about 20 miles upstream from where the Chinese and most other maps show the crossing. Nehru's notes (1959) indicate a Ladakh-Tibet boundary near Deming, roughly in line with the Indian claims. Thus far, no clashes in this area have been reported, but the divergence noted on the maps suggests that the Deming area is a likely trouble spot -- particularly since the narrow trail following the Indus Valley is one of the routes of entry specified in the 1954 Sino-Indian Trade Convention.

Southeastern Tibet-India Sector

From Ladakh to Nepal, the India-Tibet border is also "traditional," in general following the crest of the Karakoram Mountains. The border, although north of the 25,000- to 25,000-foot peaks of the Great Himalayas range are south of the Karakoram. The border disputes here are and their origin is unclear. Tibetan claims (since parts of the frontier area apparently belong to Tibet prior to British rule) are not necessarily as to which portion of the frontier is the water divide. The Government of India cites an support for its claims (based on tradition and the water divide principle). The support by China of the six passes specified in the 1954 Sino-Indian Trade Agreement as the only routes to be used by Indian troops and pilgrims. The support by China of the government between the Chinese and Indian as to the border alignment in the vicinity of these passes. The border subject to water passes to the frontier, however, is subject to differing interpretations. The Chinese hold the position that the delineation of the border is subject to water passes to the frontier, disputes have occurred in the past and the border has never been formally demarcated. Although Chinese and Indian maps differ significantly only in the Sino-Tibet road, Chinese incursions and recent disputes have arisen in several other places -- notably at Shigatse, Lhasa, and in the Sino-Tibet area.

The immediate frontier area is inhabited only during summer and fall, when altitude permits can be grazed and the high passes are open. The border, Tibetan-related groups who inhabit the Indian side of the mountains, cross the area from July through October on trading missions to and from Tibet. Traditionally, Tibetan officials travel across on horseback and the British on Tibetan who ventured south of the passes -- a practice continued even during the period of

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